



Peak District Youth Ranger Programme 2007-2011

HLF project: HG-06-01128 "Training for the Future"

Evaluation report



March 2011

David Mount, Countryside Training Partnership

www.countrysidepartnership.co.uk

☎ 01433-670300



Summary

The first part of this evaluation report presents the project story. The youth ranger programme set out to work with disadvantaged youngsters from in and around the Peak District National Park, the aim being to expose them to a range of outdoor / conservation related activities. The response of both the young people and their leaders to this programme of activities was very positive. Problems were encountered in recruiting the target audience. The number of events delivered, and the number of young people taking part, fell well short of what was planned. One goal was to empower youth leaders so that they would take on the programme approach themselves. This hasn't happened in practice.

Part two of the report reviews why the programme failed to meet its targets, concluding that given the challenges faced by the programme the project monitoring and risk management systems which were in place failed to address delivery shortfalls. It is suggested mentoring and / or stronger oversight by HLF might have been helpful.

Part three of the report could be used as a briefing note for those charged with taking this agenda forward. It identifies the legacy which the programme has created, challenges some aspects of the youth ranger philosophy and suggests that a future programme might usefully link in with parallel schemes. The National Park Authority might decide to develop a more broadly based programme on its own, but all parties might benefit if the NPA works with partner organisations from both the voluntary and private sectors.

The Youth Ranger approach clearly has many strengths, and the Peak District offers many opportunities for such an initiative. Further roll-out of the programme must retain and build on the existing philosophy, while achieving better value for money and giving a larger number of young people a high quality experience.

1 The project story

Programme philosophy and approach

- 1.1 The focus for this programme, which was delivered (and part funded) by the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) with significant additional funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), was young people from disadvantaged groups and from BME backgrounds living in and around the Peak District National Park.
- 1.2 This focus is very much in line with the mission of both organisations: the PDNPA vision for the Peak District is as a place "where people from all parts of our diverse society have the opportunity to visit, appreciate, understand and enjoy the National Park's special qualities", while HLF "believes that everybody should have the opportunity to identify, care for and enjoy heritage", and wants "new people and groups take an active part" in this.
- 1.3 The ethos of the programme was to introduce these young people to a completely different world to the one they usually inhabit, and - for example - to raise their awareness of different sorts of outdoor / environment-related jobs they might aspire to in the future. This was to be achieved in the context of a national park, highlighting the need to understand and look after the natural environment.
- 1.4 Programme goals were to:
 - i) Engage the target audience in heritage and conservation activities within the national park.
 - ii) Work with youth workers and teachers to raise their awareness of the heritage and recreational activities available to young people within the Peak District
 - iii) Equip youth workers and teachers with the skills and confidence to take on the philosophy and practice of this programme on their own.

1.5 The principal delivery 'packages' were:

- a) A range of one-day or half-day "taster days" (for school and youth groups) and "family learning days". These were promoted as opportunities to "try your hand at surviving the outdoors ... learn bushcraft skills such as firelighting or building your own shelter ... try practical conservation tasks ... learn how to navigate".
- b) The full youth ranger training programme. This was a 5-7 day programme, with a total of 60 hours contact time, typically delivered over a month or so. Young people who completed the (very well presented) workbook could attain 6 COPE credits (ASDAN). Eight full programmes have been delivered over the lifetime of the project.
- c) Training for adults – these 'training the trainer' programmes were targeted at teachers and youth leaders who were intending to run outdoor activities with young people in the National Park.

This final element of the programme (which was core to achieving goal (iii) above) proved to be over-ambitious, and participants did not come forward. Much of the time and resource allocated to this was instead used to put on two events (a 3-day residential with a follow up one-day workshop) for Youth Ranger programmes from across the UK, with a view to sharing good practice and establishing a support network for those involved in such work. These events were put on in collaboration with EUROPARC, who also contributed £2,000 of additional funds.

1.6 The four topics covered by the programme were:

- * Conservation and biodiversity (comprising both practical work and ecological surveys)
- * Survival skills and bushcraft
- * Navigation in the outdoors
- * Understanding and interpreting the environment (through media such as video, audio trails and guided walks).

The Youth Ranger pilot scheme 2005-06

The Peak District National Park Authority delivered an 18-month pilot scheme in 2004-05, building on and contributing to what at that time was the new EUROPARC Junior Ranger concept, see www.europarc.org/what-we-do/junior-ranger

This project covered a similar set of activities to the 2007-11 programme, the notable difference being that participants were predominantly white, able youngsters, aged 13-15, and mostly living within the National Park. A total of 30 young people from eight of the 'Peak Eleven' schools took part in a nine-day programme, including a residential element.

This pilot scheme also received support from HLF, under the Young Routes programme (ref. YR-04-50132).

Response of those who took part in the programme

- 1.7 A small sample of group leaders was interviewed as part of this evaluation, from Derbyshire County Council Children and Young Adults Service, Chorlton High School and Myers Grove School. They were all delighted with the experience that their children had with the youth ranger programme:

"They were talking about their time in the Peak District for weeks afterwards"

"These are difficult to reach inner-city kids ... not the sort to have parents to take them camping ... really good for them to have 1:1 contact with different adults"

The end-of course review sheets filled in by the young people themselves were also generally very positive, for example:

“If I camp again I will know how to start a fire and I now know how to read a map”

albeit with the occasional:

“I want to do less walking because it’s horrible”

What was planned, and what was delivered?

1.8 The table below provides a numerical summary of what was delivered over the programme lifespan.

Activity	Targets			Achieved (estimate)		
	No. of events	No. of adults	Young people	No. of events	No. of adults	Young people
Taster Days, Family days	60	250	2,250	54	297	1,132
1-day Youth Ranger Introduction Days for Young People delivered by external group leaders	40					
Full accredited Youth Ranger Programme (delivered internally and externally)	13		195	8		353
Training for adults - 'training the trainer'	3	45		4	78	
5-day staff training programme for PDNPA staff	1	15		1	12	
Network of organisations developed to support promotion					?	
Youth Ranger website produced			✓			✓
Total number of Young People engaged			2,445			1,485
Total number of adults engaged		310			387	
Total number of events	117			67		

Notes:

- * A number of targets have not been achieved, some by a substantial margin.
- * Delivery by external group leaders did not happen (see 1.5 (c) above).
- * It is not clear how a figure of 353 for young people on the full programme was achieved over 8 courses, given typical attendance in the range 10-15 (the programme administrator, who could no doubt shed light on this and other issues, is currently on maternity leave).

Timeline

1.9 The programme got off to a very good start when in Year 1 Derbyshire County Council Children and Young Adults Service commissioned a number of events for children in care etc. and supported this with a grant of £21,000 from the DCC “Youth Opportunity Fund”.

1.10 The timeline below highlights two periods of hiatus:

- * In the 12 month period following award of the HLF grant. This has been attributed, firstly, to a major review of Losehill Hall which took place at this time, and secondly to delays in being able to recruit a project administrator and Youth Ranger leaders with the appropriate mix of skills and experience, and then in obtaining CRB clearance. Partly as a result of this slow start the programme end-date was moved back from May 2010 to March 2011.
- * When the first tranche of Youth Ranger leaders all left in the second half of 2009. It is reported that these individuals left because, although committed to the programme philosophy, they were not happy with the way the programme was being delivered.

1.11 From the information which has been retrieved it is not altogether clear when the 8 full ranger programmes were delivered / completed. It does seem however that only two full programmes were delivered over the final eighteen months of the scheme.

	2004-05	2006	2007			2008			2009			2010			2011											
			May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov.	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov.	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Pilot programme (Young Routes)																										
Development of business plan. HLF application																										
HLF award approved																										
Initial programme																										
Programme extension																										
Full Youth Ranger programmes																										
Website established																										
Youth Ranger Leader in post																										
Youth Ranger Leader in post																										
Youth Ranger Leader in post																										
Youth Ranger Leader in post																										
Youth Ranger Leader in post																										
Youth Ranger Leader in post (casual)																										
Youth Ranger Leader in post (casual)																										

Finance and value for money

Total Projected Income	
HLF	£142,000
PDNPA	£103,706
User groups*	£35,575
Total	£281,281
Expenditure (to 1st Jan. 2011)	
Project delivery costs #	£37,926
Project management, administration	£140,183
Equipment, materials, website	£20,553
Miscellaneous	£6,648
Total	£205,309
* £21,000 of this sum from Derbyshire County Council "Youth Opportunity Fund"	
# Youth ranger leaders + food, accommodation, transport (assuming 50% of youth leader time spent on actual delivery)	

- 1.12 The figures in the above table suggest that development, management and administration costs are very high in comparison with delivery costs, even given the way in which the Youth Ranger programme set out to work with hard-to-reach young people, and that each group required – to an extent – a bespoke programme. This ratio would be less if, in particular, the planned number of full ranger programmes had been delivered. The project budget at outset was £252,000. Additional management costs (of £29,000) were incurred as a result of the programme being extended by an additional ten months. These additional costs have been met by the National Park Authority
- 1.13 The cost to user groups coming on the full programme was perceived by some stakeholders as high (somewhere in the range of £150 - £350 per child). It has been argued that commercial providers of bushcraft and other outdoor education experiences offer similar packages at a more competitive rate, albeit typically for a 'mainstream' audience. The price of the full programme has been cited by some group leaders as the reason they didn't buy into the programme.
- 1.14 This programme received significantly greater levels of funding than any of the other youth ranger programmes across the UK. Most of these other programmes are not targeted at hard-to-reach groups, so value-for-money comparisons would be of little use.

2 Delivery issues

Recruitment

- 2.1 The principal issue which emerges from this review appears to be difficulties in attracting the target audience onto the programme. The programme was promoted in a range of ways – through the website (www.youthrangers.com - which was professionally designed and is of high quality), through targeted mailings, and by presentations at conferences etc. Once interest had been raised, these approaches were followed up by 1:1 meetings with leaders of potential groups. Offering taster days at no cost was another part of the promotion strategy.
- 2.2 Programme managers were disappointed that some organisations which might have become key delivery partners – such as the Mosaic¹ and Peakwise People² - in the event decided not to become involved. Opportunities also appear to have been missed because – at the time – there was no central repository of contact details for potential clients held by the National Park Authority.
- 2.3 The marketing approach may not have focussed closely enough on the target group. A good deal of time and resource was apparently spent attending public events – e.g. National Trust open days in Castleton – which were very unlikely to yield interest in the appropriate quarters. There is evidence to suggest that quite frequently the ‘wrong’ demographic group attended the taster and family days - for example girl guide groups who reportedly were ‘mainstream’. Family days in particular don’t appear to have attracted the target group, and sometimes passers-by who had already found their own way to the Peak District were invited to take part.
- 2.4 The programme also appears to have been affected by a significant number of ‘no-shows’ / last-minute cancellations. This could have been due to:
- * Reluctance on the part of the young people to take up the opportunities they were offered
 - * Difficulty in finding sufficient teachers / group leaders to accompany the children (perhaps in particular a reluctance to bivvy out overnight?). Recruiting leaders to accompany groups on activities away from base is not an uncommon problem for schools / youth organisations.
 - * The very fact that the taster days were free may have led to ‘no-shows’. Again it is well established that if something is free at point of delivery some customers perceive it to be of low value / something which can be dropped with little regret.

¹ <http://www.mosaicnationalparks.org>

² <http://resources.peakdistrict.gov.uk/sa2010/kloe-evidence/66.Peak%20Wise%20People%20Project%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Impact of failure to attract target audience

- 2.5 A significant number of planned events were cancelled at the last minute. There appears to have been capacity in terms of availability of Youth Ranger leaders, sites and equipment to have run a much larger programme if clients had been recruited. Frequent cancellations were also cited as one cause of demoralisation amongst the Youth Ranger leaders. Staff time and resources may have been mis-spent. Leaders reported that too much time was spent on training and preparation, not enough on time on delivery. One response to this criticism is that training of staff was critical given that the programme set out to work with 'difficult' children (there was an instance for example of a staff member being assaulted by one group member).
- 2.6 In part as a result of these difficulties too much resource appears to have gone into working with younger children and their parents, and with others not involved with the target audience. This is not in itself a problem of course, but such activities don't then contribute to programme goals, and numbers recorded in the table "What was planned, and what was delivered?" (above) are probably misleading, in that they do not represent attendance by the target group.

Lessons to be learnt

- 2.7 The success of a programme like this can in large part be attributed to the personalities and personal enthusiasm of those involved, both teachers and group leaders who work full-time with the target audience and amongst the team delivering the programme. This enthusiasm and interest needs to be constantly topped up particularly as staff move on.
- 2.8 Hopefully the difficulties outlined above were anticipated when the programme was developed, and an appropriate monitoring and risk management system was established. Whether or not these difficulties were anticipated, there does not appear to have been an adequate management response to emerging problems.
- 2.9 A different relationship with HLF, as primary funders of the programme, might have helped address these challenges early on in the programme. With hindsight transferring 50% of HLF's contribution before the programme began, and a further 40% mid-term, failed to send the right message to programme managers about delivery expectations. It is not of course possible for HLF officers based in Nottingham to maintain ongoing overview of a programme such as this, but again (with hindsight) spending £1,000 - £2,000 on a project mentor / monitor might have yielded returns in terms of better spending the project grant of £142,000. Such an individual (with strong links to the world of countryside rangers, outdoor / environmental education and national park management) could have acted as a 'critical friend' to the programme, picking up on the identified weakness in project management, by both challenging and supporting those involved in delivery.

3 Taking things forward

Programme legacy

3.1 The legacy from this programme includes:

- * A number of individuals experienced in delivering the programme
- * A level of good-will and interest from partners who might help with delivery in the future
- * Some awareness amongst the target audience of what this approach offers their groups
- * An established curriculum, leaders notes,
- * ASDAN Youth Ranger Award accreditation and handbook
- * A number of sites where the programme can be delivered
- * Outdoor and audio-visual equipment.
- * The website
- * Established administrative procedures

Perhaps most importantly there is a commitment of resources from the National Park Authority (through the new Learning and Discovery Team) to build on this legacy.

Is this the right 'youth ranger' model?

3.2 In the light of experience some interviewees have questioned the approach the programme adopted.

- * The Youth Ranger ('Junior Ranger') model originates in Europe, and is (for example) proving particularly popular in Germany. Before proceeding in the Peak District, it is important to reflect on how appropriate this model is in our own (youth) culture.
- * Some disquiet has been expressed about the focus on survival skills / sleeping out overnight (not in any way typical of countryside ranger activity in the UK). While acknowledging that for some young people this sounds very attractive (creating resonance with television programmes such as 'I'm a celebrity, get me out of here' or Ray Mears' programmes), it has been suggested that if this element were replaced with night walks / earth education activities this would result in more effective engagement between young people and the conservation and communication ethic at the heart of ranger work. In any event the aspiration to enjoy the environment while 'leaving no trace' should be prominent in the programme philosophy (during this review I was shown night shelters which were left standing long after an event).

3.3 Most of those involved in the programme think it is important that young people on the programme should have meaningful engagement with real-life rangers as part of their experience. The Peak District is fortunate in that we not only have the national park Ranger service, but also National Trust wardens (soon to be re-designated as rangers), and that both organisations also support volunteer rangers.

Progression and accreditation

3.4 We live in a world replete with initiatives and awards. In close parallel with the youth ranger programme, others are involved in delivery of the John Muir Award

<http://www.jmt.org/jmaward-home.asp>³ and the Forest School approach http://www.foresteducation.org/woodland_learning/forest_schools. Both of these have a lot to offer youngsters targeted by the youth ranger programme. PDNPA is also considering launching a new 'Peak District Award', although at least initially this would be aimed at primary age children. The well-established Duke of Edinburgh Award is another parallel route.

- 3.5 The current programme offers one-off, short term engagement with the National Park environment, and progression is limited to attending a taster day followed by the full Youth ranger programme. Other UK programmes see benefit in longer term engagement (six months – two years), and offer, for example, progression to 'Advanced Youth Ranger' and then to standard 'volunteer ranger' roles. This sort of progression may be more problematic given the target group for the Peak District programme.
- 3.6 In identifying possible futures for the programme it is also important to see how it might fit in with other schemes. The last government subsidised outdoor learning for young people from disadvantaged groups through the 'Do It 4 Real' initiative (managed by the YHA, with a lot of delivery in the Peak District). The coalition government has recently launched the 'National Citizen Service' pilots. One of the delivery organisations is the Field Studies Council and it will be worth keeping an eye on how / if this initiative develops in the Peak District, and how the youth ranger philosophy might contribute in the future.

Organisations which might be involved in future delivery

- 3.7 This programme added an important plank to the National Park Authority's education provision. It enabled the Authority to engage with a different audience, with a less academic focus. There were obvious challenges for the Losehill Hall team in moving away from environmental education into a programme more closely aligned with the world of 'outdoor education'.
- 3.8 The NPA's Learning and Discovery team is being re-organised following the sale of Losehill Hall to the YHA. Co-location of the team with the YHA opens the door to further co-operation / partnership. The NPA Learning and Discovery team already have close links with the National Trust, with a co-funded post based at the Moorland Discovery Centre at the Longshaw Estate.
- 3.9 Experience with youth ranger schemes elsewhere suggests that this programme might benefit if it were delivered in full partnership with other organisations rather than being primarily a National Park Authority initiative. The benefits of a wider partnership include:
- * Meeting the aims / ticking the boxes for a number of organisations, all of whom have similar goals in terms of engagement with hard-to-reach groups
 - * Involvement of partners with experience of delivering cost-effective outdoor education (e.g. the Edale YHA Activity Centre as well as independent outdoor education providers – see below).
 - * Critically a formal partnership with one or more user-group organisations (e.g. Mosaic or any successor body), as well as potential providers, might address some of the recruitment problems identified above.
- 3.10 A plethora of other organisations also offer a range of outdoor education activities across the Peak District. One alternative when thinking about future provision of this sort, rather than retaining a separate 'youth ranger' programme, is also to consider how the

³ The John Muir Award is a central plank - for example - of the Cairngorm Junior Ranger programme <http://www.jmt.org/assets/john%20muir%20award/cairngorms%20national%20park%20junior%20ranger%20project.pdf>

programme's philosophy and practice could be integrated into programmes which others already provide. This is one way whereby the programme could reach more young people, and would mean the role of the National Park Authority would move from one of delivery to one of facilitation / support. Having said that, it should be emphasised that the National Park Authority sees this sort of provision as an important plank of its own delivery portfolio.

Business options

3.11 This programme has been well resourced, but was also perceived by some as expensive at point of delivery. Any future programme should focus resources to a much greater extent on delivery, and development and management costs need to be kept firmly under control. Rather than appointing a full-time manager, it is worth considering a more devolved management system where youth ranger leaders took a bigger role in marketing the programme – including initial visits to potential participants. This would also enable a personal link to be made with a group, which could be sustained throughout the period of engagement. It has been suggested that way leaders were allocated to different elements of the programme has sometimes militated against the development of such a relationship. If the Youth Ranger leaders were to take on this role they would need appropriate levels of training and support.

3.12 One reason why the ratio of management costs to delivery costs is so poor is because the programme failed to reach a critical mass in terms the number of events which were delivered. One way round this would be to maintain a special focus on the target audience while also opening the programme to mainstream audiences

3.13 A number of different business models could be developed and evaluated:

- * A self-funding programme run on a commercial, albeit not-for-profit, basis.
- * A programme where, as at present, PDNPA (and other partners) make a contribution in-kind – recognising that this programme contributes to their core purposes / mission. The balance of funds would need to be provided by users.
- * A programme under-written by external funds. These would need to be clearly targeted on the priority, hard-to-reach, audience.

Within all the options outlined above the possibility of cross-subsidy – from mainstream groups to priority groups – should be considered. Experience suggests however that this approach is more often proposed in business plans than it is delivered in practice.

3.14 Obstacles to delivery which need to be incorporated into provisional business models include:

- * Ability of user groups to find funds for transport to the Peak District and to pay for the programme itself.
- * Need to ensure ethos of Youth Ranger programme is maintained, especially if other partners will different agendas become more centrally involved.
- * Current financial difficulties faced by all parts of the economy.

3.15 Finally when thinking about how the programme might be delivered in the future there is an imperative to keep this programme special. In looking for better value for money there is a risk of swinging too far in the other direction, and delivering a cut-price but low quality experience. Those of us who treasure the national park ethos, and who see our heritage as one of our greatest assets, would never want it sold short. Our aim always should be to ensure the experiences young people have in the Peak District are memorable and potentially life-changing. Better there should be no youth ranger programme than something which dilutes the current provision down to something which is only mediocre.

Appendix: Consultees and other sources of information

This review was carried out during February 2011. At this time Losehill Hall was being run down, prior to its sale to the Youth Hostels Association. Some key staff had left, while others were on maternity / sick leave. This has made it more difficult to obtain information about the programme. The following sources have however been drawn on:

- Review of electronic and paper files held at Losehill Hall
While some of these are excellent – e.g. the Access Database - it proved difficult to track down some key documents, and to cross-relate to certain activities.
- Finance information from FRED (the PDNPA finance system) and the Excel monitoring database
Colleagues in National Park Authority finance section have been extremely helpful in supplying and interpreting these. Financial information provides hard evidence of activities which occurred at given dates.
- Meetings with staff based at Losehill Hall.
Youth ranger programme manager, Losehill Hall management personnel, Learning and Discovery Team leader.
- Phone and face-to-face interviews with others involved in programme delivery
Current and previous youth ranger leaders, other trainers
- Meetings with other stake-holders, partners, potential partners
PDNPA ranger service: meeting with Andy Farmer and Terry Page
YHA: meetings with Alistair Boyd (Castleton YHA) and Joe Hardy (manager of Edale YHA activity centre).
National Trust: Meeting with Rachel Mora-Bannon (visitor services manager) and Jenny Gerrans (community learning and events officer)
Discussion with Jon Cree, who chairs the Great Britain Forest School Trainers Network.
- Feedback from group leaders
Discussions with youth leaders / teachers from Myers Grove School, Sheffield; Chorlton High School, Manchester; Derbyshire County Council Children and Young Adults Service
- Ranger programmes elsewhere in the UK
One-day workshop with colleagues involved in delivering or developing youth ranger programmes in County Durham, Fife, Wye Valley AONB, Anglesey AONB, Lake District National Park and the Mendip Hills AONB.
- Review of the Mendip Hills youth ranger programme carried out in 2010
http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/up_085319_mhaonb_young_ranger_scheme_report_200810.pdf